



Montgomery County Council

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Montgomery Councilmembers Ervin, Leventhal to Join Public Forum on Health Enterprise Zones on Thursday, July 26

*At Long Branch Community Center, Lt. Governor Brown,
County Executive Leggett Expected for Discussion of New
Initiative to Expand Health Care in Underserved Communities*

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ROCKVILLE, Md., July 25, 2012—Montgomery County Councilmembers Valerie Ervin and George Leventhal on Thursday, July 26, will join Maryland Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett and community members in a public forum to discuss the new Health Enterprise Zone (HEZ) initiative that was led by Lt. Governor Brown and passed by the General Assembly. The \$4 million program aims to reduce health disparities by expanding primary care and public health in underserved communities.

The forum, which will begin at 7 p.m., will be held at the Long Branch Community Center at 8700 Piney Branch Rd. in Silver Spring. It is free and open to the public.

Lt. Governor Brown was a driving force behind the Health Disparities and Reduction Act of 2012, which seeks to reduce health disparities among Maryland's racial and ethnic groups and between geographic areas. The initiative is designed to improve health care access and health outcomes, and reduce health care costs, by providing a variety of incentives to defined geographic areas with high rates of disparities.

"We welcome the opportunity to meet with Lt. Governor Anthony Brown to discuss his Health Enterprise Zone Program in Long Branch," said Councilmember Ervin, who represents Montgomery County's District 5, which includes Long Branch. "Reducing health disparities in our community is essential because there are significant areas of need arising from our distinctive population especially in communities of color. In Long Branch, the percentages of elementary school students receiving free and reduced meals, an indicator of poverty, ranges from 44 to nearly 90 percent, and many of these children do not receive adequate health care."

According to the United Health Foundation, Maryland ranks 35th in infectious diseases, 34th in health outcomes, and 33rd regarding geographic health disparities, despite numerous positive measures, such as having the second highest rate of primary care providers per capita and one of the 10 lowest rates of smoking. Funded with \$4 million allocated to the Community Health Resources Commission, it is anticipated that the state will approve two to four Health Enterprise Zones throughout Maryland that will be established through a competitive application process.

“In underserved neighborhoods, routine symptoms that might be easily treated become serious, intractable health conditions,” said Lt. Governor Brown. “By saturating underserved communities with primary care providers and health care services through innovative Health Enterprise Zones, we can help ensure healthier Marylanders who live a better quality of life. This forum is an opportunity to engage with community members, local leaders and health care providers who are closest to the issues facing our communities. I want to thank Councilmembers Ervin and Leventhal and County Executive Leggett for their leadership and for hosting us in Montgomery County.”

According to a June 2012 report from the State Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, some of the largest disparities between blacks and whites in Montgomery County are seen for emergency department (ED) visit rates for diabetes, asthma and hypertension, where the black rates of admission are typically three to four times higher than the corresponding white rates.

“Montgomery County has the greatest diversity and most significant health disparities in the state,” said Councilmember Leventhal, who chairs the Council’s Health and Human Services Committee. “We are grateful for Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown’s Health Enterprise Zones initiative, and for the support of Sen. Roger Manno and the rest of our delegation in the General Assembly in bringing this initiative to our County. Our community health improvement program, Healthy Montgomery, will act as the platform for our successful participation, providing the data necessary to improve health outcomes for our diverse population.”

Non-profit community-based organizations and local government agencies are eligible to submit an application for HEZ designation on behalf of an area or community. The applying organization would be eligible for grant funds to increase health services, and practitioners working with the community organization in an approved HEZ would be eligible for a menu of incentives such as loan assistance repayment, hiring and income tax credits, priority for the receipt of state funding available for electronic health records and preference to enter the Maryland Patient Centered Medical Home Program.

More information about Health Enterprise Zones is available at <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/healthenterprisezones/SitePages/Home.aspx> or by email hez@dhmh.state.md.us.

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